

Summary

The social dimension: a paradox of transforming higher education

Higher education (HE) policies are going through substantial changes in many countries. The Bologna Process is an important driver of this change at the European level. The research aims at discussing the transformation of the HE policies under national and international level influences and focusing on the social dimension action line of the Bologna Process. The need of the research lies on the fact that the social dimension is in the process of reformulation in the development of the Bologna Process. Nevertheless, the definition of the main features, the scope and the transformation of the social dimension action line are not clearly analysed yet. The research aims at a comparative analysis of the social dimension action line in Finland, Germany and Turkey. Such a research, at this point, will elucidate the policy making processes by unfolding the inherited paradoxes of the Bologna Process, in addition to contributing to academic knowledge by discussing a developing issue of the field.

The Bologna Process introduced comprehensive restructurings for HE systems. Hence, as a remarkable development, it has become a drive shaping HE policies of the signatory countries. Therefore, it is important to examine the rationales and objectives of the Bologna Process.

The Bologna Process defines ten action lines and the social dimension as an overarching action line. As a late comer action line of the process, its definition and implementation stages are not clear yet. In this sense, it is neglected in the policy making processes. The research aims at following the transformation of HE policies on the key issues of the social dimension action line, such as HE as public good and responsibility understanding, access to HE and promotion of student participation in HE governance.

In order to reach comprehensive analyses, interrogation of further drives, affecting the Bologna Process and indirectly the social dimension action line, is also necessary. Despite not being exhaustive, the research concentrates on the relevant aspects of the transformation of the nation state and internationalisation/globalisation processes. The transformation of the nation state has had essential influences on HE policies. Namely, the rise of neo liberal policies thinned out the relations between the HE institutions and the nation states. Yet, HE continues to be indispensable with its vital contributions to the social and economic prosperity of countries. Next, globalisation and internationalisation processes have shaped HE policy making processes through the promotion of international competition and the requirement of structural and administrative reforms.

The comparative implementation analysis of the action line will illustrate the transformation of HE policies and the contemporary situation of the social dimension in them and hence will create the main basis of the analyses. Conclusions will be drawn from the policy analysis. Therefore, the changes in the HE systems rather than in the individual HE institutions are analysed. Finally, the research asks if it is possible to conclude a common pattern of transformation among the selected countries and discusses pros and cons of a possible pattern.

To sum up, the research discusses the social dimension action line of the Bologna Process as a neglected and paradoxical policy making area. In doing this, a possible definition of the action line and drives shaping policies on the social dimension are searched through comparative policy analyses.